On the Map

A History of
Vision Gaspé-Percé Now

VISION
Gaspé - Percé Now



On the Map: A History of Vision Gaspé-Percé Now is part of the Regional Development Network "Organizational Histories" series of publications. Looking back helps understand organizations as they were when they were founded, provides a sense of context for current missions and mandates, and projects identities and approaches into the future. Regional community development associations serving the English-language minority population often serve outlying areas and dispersed populations, they operate in numerous sectors, and they mobilize small communities ultimately to ensure equity and access across the province. Their history is also the history of Quebec.


The Gaspé

VISION Gaspé - Percé Now

Main office: GASPÉ

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Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise
Québec

Sources:
Bonfyre Media, CBC, CHSSN, CTV News, Gaspé *Spec*, Musée de la Gaspésie: Fonds Famille Agnesi de Douglastown, Fonds Ethel Cass, Fonds Robert Fortin, and Fonds Famille Legros, Native-Land.ca, *La Presse*, Radio Gaspésie, RDN, Vision Gaspé-Percé Now

Written and edited by:
Katia Grubisic

Graphic design and layout by:
Jacinthe Roy, Imprimerie de la Baie

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RDN
Regional Development Network
Réseau de Développement Régional

Regional Development Network
1135 Grande Allée West, suite 180
Québec QC G1S 1E7
418.684.8810
info@regdevnet.ca

Imprimerie de la Baie
161 Perron Boulevard West
New Richmond QC G0C 2B0

Investing in community

RDN member organizations play a leading role in supporting and strengthening English-speaking minority communities in Quebec. Their essential work contributes to cultural vitality, community resilience, and access to services that support their development and long-term sustainability. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to this mission!



THE HONORABLE

Marc Miller

Canadian Heritage Patrimoine canadien

Shaped by commitment

Quebec English-language community organizations have a rich history, shaped by commitment and resilience, and in the spirit of dialogue. This booklet is a testament to their important contribution to Quebec society. The Government of Quebec is proud to support these efforts to honour the past, and commends these communities for their dedication.



Christopher Skeete

MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR RELATIONS WITH ENGLISH-SPEAKING QUEBECERS

Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise

Québec

The English presence in Quebec

The English presence in Quebec is a patchwork quilt, an island in the archipelago that is Quebec in North America. For years, for decades, and even for centuries, scattered groups of English speakers have worked to grow thriving communities—places where we help each other, where we look to our elders and look out for our little ones, where we fight for our rights and for what's right. Across the province, we have worked to build places that feel like home.

The work to build, to represent, and to grow has been a labour of love by so many community members. That community has also been supported by a number of agencies and institutions, some of which are named in these pages. In the early days, the Secretary of State offered funding; in later years, the Government of Canada has been seminal to the community's stability, including through Department of Canadian Heritage programs for official language minority communities and funding from Health Canada. More recently, the provincial Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise has also contributed. In every region, various municipal and regional bodies find ways to help. Many hands make light work.

The nineteen community development organizations that make up the membership of the Regional Development Network represent towns, MRCs, and regions across the province. The oldest among them was founded over fifty years ago; the youngest is only seven years old. These regional groups have a wide spectrum of programming, including health and social services, culture and heritage, activities for seniors, youth, and children, education, employment, social enterprise… After all, in a village, everyone is something of a jack of all trades. That expertise also comes from listening—to what community members have to say, to what's needed, and to opportunities as they arise.

In more recent years, we have worked to put our communities on the map. The English-speaking population of Quebec has undergone extraordinary changes, and we are more diverse than ever. But whether home is nestled in the north, perched in the Appalachians, or staring out to sea, we share the same concerns, and the same ties that bind. And as we stitch together our communities, as we drift away and back, as we carve out a space for ourselves and our children, we take a moment to pause, to look around; we take a moment to both celebrate our roots and welcome the future.

Vision Gaspé-Percé Now is a nonprofit community development organization that represents English-speaking communities along the Gaspesian coast from Gaspé Bay area and Prével to Corner of the Beach (Coin-du-Banc) in the eastern portion of Percé.

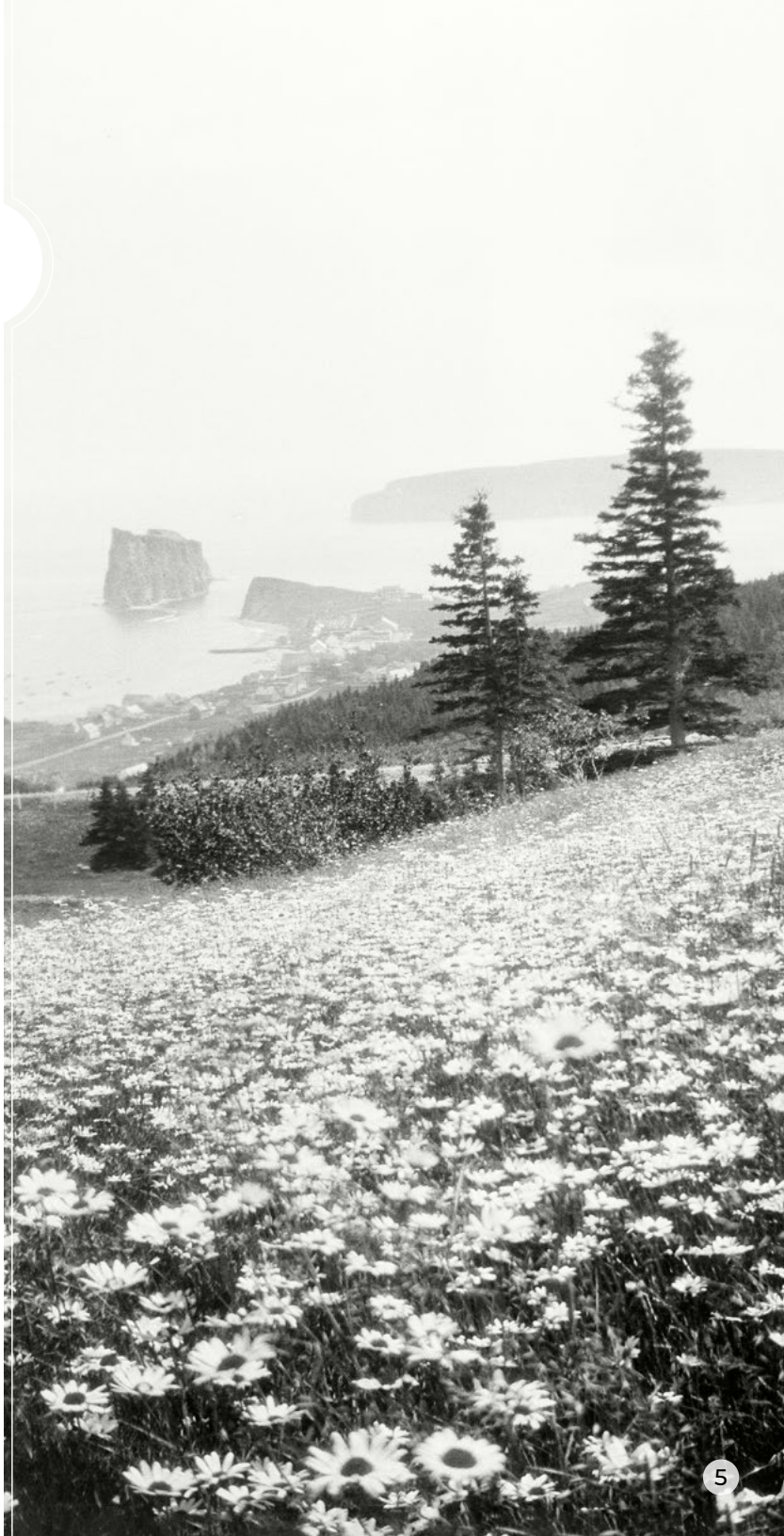






Vision responds to anyone in the community who wishes to receive services in English, and creates programming for all age groups. As well, an important aspect of the organization's work is strengthening connections between other community partners and Anglo-Gaspesians to ensure both a public awareness of the services that are available, and a way for service providers to recognize and meet the needs of English speakers, in health and social services, education and employment, youth, early childhood and family support, and services for new arrivals.

The organization was founded over twenty years ago, as the service structure for support and development in the minority community was expanding rapidly. Vision was founded to address a lack of representation in the eastern sector of the region, and over the years has become a key player in the provincial linguistic minority and an important partner in the social ecosystem of the Gaspé coast.



Foundations

At the eastern tip of the peninsula, the land leans into the sea. In Gaspé and Percé, cliffs rise sharply from the water, carved by the tides and the wind. The Gulf of St. Lawrence stretches out toward Newfoundland, with the long arm of Forillon National Park curving north, and, to the south, the famous cleft rock standing guard at the edge of the continent.

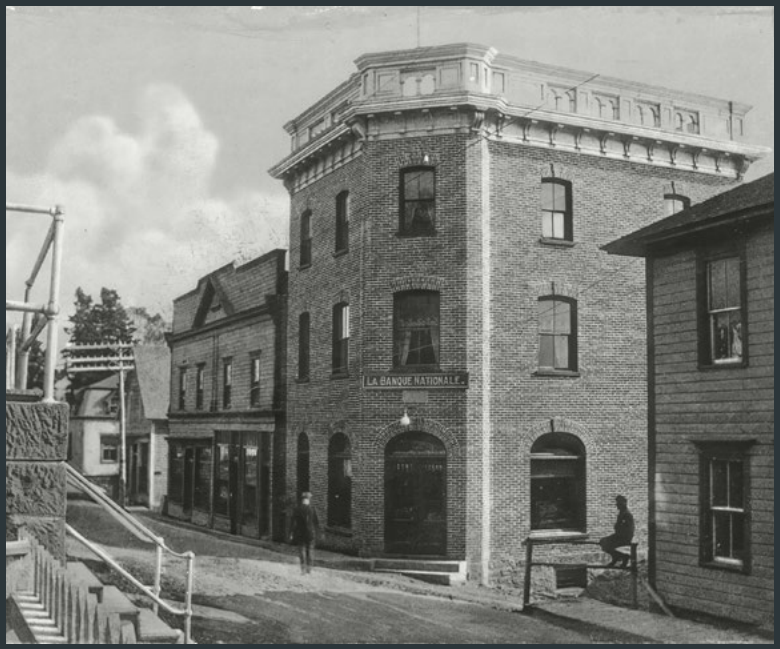


The Mi'kmaq have lived for thousands of years in the region called "gespe'g," which refers to the end of the land. The sea, forests, and rivers provided food, materials, and trade routes, shaping daily life and movement across the territory. The Gaspé was not just a stopping point, but an important part of a larger, well-established homeland in the confederated Wabanaki territories. Mi'kmaq communities in the eastern Gaspé, including Gesgapegiag and Gespeg, continue to play a vital role in the region's cultural and social life.

English-speaking settlers arrived in the eastern Gaspé in the eighteenth century from England, Ireland, Scotland, and the Channel Islands; American Loyalists also later settled across the region. They formed small but tight-knit communities alongside their French neighbours, often centered around fishing, forestry, and rail work. Anglophone families were concentrated in towns like Gaspé, New Carlisle, Percé, Douglastown, Barachois, and parts of the Baie-des-Chaleurs area, where they had their own schools, churches, and social networks, which helped sustain a strong sense of identity despite living in a largely Francophone province.

Over time, economic shifts and the decline of traditional industries particularly from the 1960s onward pushed many young English-speakers to leave in search of work. Language laws and




LA BANQUE NATIONALE







broader political changes in Quebec also added to feelings of uncertainty, and other Anglophones left after the first referendum. By the end of the twentieth century, the English-speaking population had decreased significantly, and was aging. Still, despite outmigration and reduced institutional presence, the community held on, through volunteerism, local leadership, and a continued attachment to the region.

There were already organizations doing community development work in the wider Gaspé region, like the Committee for Anglophone Social Action and Family Ties, both based in New Carlisle. CASA, which has been around since 1975, was especially playing an important role. But the Gaspé coast is a large territory to serve, and, by the turn of the millennium, English speakers in the eastern sector of the region were noting a gap in services. After a public consultation, and with help from Gary Briand, who had been involved years earlier in getting CASA off the ground, the community chose to found a new organization.

The original goal, defined at a meeting in November 2003, was pretty simple, and shared neighbouring organizations' values: to make sure the English-speaking community could access resources, especially when it came to navigating health and social services. Anglophones needed more support to be able to get the same services as everyone else.

In 2004, that spirit of regional collaboration gave birth to Vision Gaspé-Percé Now.

At first, there were some adjustments as each group tried to figure out its territory and its mandate, which was no surprise given the limited funding available. "Establishing Vision's catchment area" was key, current executive director Jessica Synnott says, "to avoid overlap and competition." A lot more can be accomplished by working together, especially with the shared goal of supporting an underserved community. A meeting with CASA in October 2008 was particularly healing, and, from that day on, collaboration became the order of the day. As current cultural coordinator Tesia Hackett says, the regional partnerships have grown into "a really beautiful example of how cooperation can help everyone thrive."

A lot more can be accomplished by working together.

People & Partnerships

Vision Gaspé-Percé Now's founding board members were **Gary Baird**, **Gary Briand**, **Susan Hutchinson**, **Denver Leggo**, **David Letemplier**, **Caroline Mullin**, **Albert Patterson**, and **Tony Patterson**. The founders in many cases had community development skills—for instance, Briand was a veteran of community associations, having helped bring the *Spec* newspaper, CASA and the Eastern Quebec Literacy Council (formerly the Gaspésie Literacy Council) into being. The board shepherded Vision through those critical first years, focusing on improving access to health and social services. Briand took over after the first president, **Charlene Eden**, stepped down, and came on again in the position in 2013. In between, the organization briefly shifted to a co-presidential model, with David Letemplier and **Brad McDonald** sharing the presidency; McDonald also held the seat by himself for several years thereafter.

In May 2005, Vision was invited to become a member of the **Community Health and Social Services Network**, which opened doors in terms of programming, funding, and connections.



Jessica Synnott

CURRENT VISION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I love that we can actually concretely help people.



Tony Conoley

CURRENT VISION PRESIDENT

Our organization has grown in experience and expertise, ensuring that our community has access to essential resources and services in their language. That mission remains at the centre of everything we do.

Vision started small, with a lone employee, working out of an office in **St. Paul's Anglican Church** in Gaspé, a local parish founded in the early nineteenth century, with successive church buildings reconstructed after fires, the most recent one in the 1940s. The first executive director was **Cynthia Patterson**. Patterson was born in Gaspé, but her family left the area when she was young. After finishing her studies, she returned to the coast: "Gaspé was definitely the place that shaped me." As in her other pursuits, including organizing rural postal workers, doing suicide prevention in Indigenous communities, and entering the Anglican ministry, her work at Vision centered on strengthening rural voices, upholding women's rights, and reminding small communities that they mattered.

Douglas Hunt was interim director until **Tracy Leotta** took over, serving for three years as executive director before moving back to her native Australia. She deepened the organization's connection to the **Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux de la Gaspésie**, and expanded throughout the region, as well as strengthening Vision's advocacy work. She notably collaborated on the regional committee for the development of the provincial Programme d'accès à des services de santé et des services sociaux en langue anglaise.

Cheryl Henry-Leggo had been project coordinator while Leotta was executive director, and had roots in the region and extensive community development



Beryl Boyle

PRINCIPAL, GASPÉ ELEMENTARY AND BELLE ANSE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Vision brings the English community together in meaningful ways.



Connie Jacques

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GESPEG

Vision is a collaborator. They're the way we see what the English community needs.

experience, particularly in literacy; she was a logical choice to succeed Leotta. Henry-Leggo helped the organization navigate the provincial health-system reforms. Vision also grew considerably under her directorship, expanding its mission from providing information around health and social services to developing programming and preventative activities. Through an increasingly well-established network of partners, including municipal governments and MRCs, provincial and federal bodies, cultural, economic development, health, and social organizations, as well as other English-speaking community development organizations, Vision was able to identify gaps and help meet needs. In doing so, it became the English-speaking community's trusted source for information, and Francophone partners' link to that community.

Jessica Synnott was working as a licensed practical nurse when Vision put out a call for a project on diabetes monitoring. That initiative ended up falling through, but one thing led to another. Synnott stepped in for a health program through New Horizons, and from there took on seniors' wellness centres. In 2017, she resigned from the healthcare system to work full-time at Vision. The



challenges of the provincial healthcare system are well known, but Synnott enjoyed the hands-on work. However, she says, as executive director at Vision Gaspé-Percé Now, she has had “more avenues to make changes. In this role, I can go further.” The Gaspé native was well aware of the needs of the region’s English-speaking community, and her role with the organization allowed her to help people in a much broader way, she explains, citing networking, partnerships, and pursuing funding opportunities. “Someone comes to me with an issue, and I can say, let’s dig a little deeper. Let’s intervene.”

One of Vision’s current project coordinators, **Tesia Hackett**, concurs. Synnott is “constantly doing all she can to advocate for the English-speaking community,” she says. “There’s a lot of integrity in everything that she does.”

Integrity has shaped Vision’s service and growth from those early days, through the many board volunteers, staff members, and community members who have pitched in over the years.



Projects & Progress

A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY

Through the Networking and Partnership Initiative, Vision is able to deliver many of its most impactful programs, including running four wellness centres that serve older adults; Bright Beginnings, which provides support for children and young families in a regional partnership with CASA and Council for Anglophone Madgalen Islanders; and the Youth Mental Health Initiative, which increases support through partnerships, delivers workshops, and helps reduce stigma.

Other programs around health and social services include the Travel4Health program to help community members who must leave the region to access specific health services; an increasingly solicited array of prenatal activities; and the McGill Training and Retention program, which aims to boost rates of bilingual healthcare students and eventually workers in the field who return to the region.

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Since its founding, Vision has used culture and heritage to gather the community and to foster a sense of belonging among English speakers in the eastern Gaspésie, with projects ranging from travelling exhibits, art workshops, storytelling initiatives, intergenerational undertakings, digital skills development, and Indigenous cultural interpretation.

Vision is able to deliver many of its most impactful programs through the NPI.

Heritage tourism is a huge contributor to the vitality and economy of the Gaspésie–Les-Îles-de-la-Madeleine region, and the number of visitors to the Gaspé has swelled, especially since the pandemic.

The organization is also taking advantage of the digital shift to increase the visibility of the English-speaking community far beyond the region. In 2020, Vision joined in on a cultural promotion initiative developed by CASA, The Gaspesian Way, and, in 2022, Bonfyre Media, a multimedia platform, was launched in collaboration with CASA and CAMI to amplify cultural voices from the region through video and audio content that celebrates the community's stories, songs, and experiences.

SPACE FOR YOUTH

The SeaScape Hangout hearkens back to a rec centre that existed many years ago in Barachois, with arcade games, two pool tables, canteen, and a jukebox. Current Vision staff remembered



Growing together







that centre fondly from their own teenage years, and consultations with local youth suggested they wanted a space of their own. There is a Maison des jeunes in Gaspé, but it's forty kilometres away, and restrictions around family scheduling, cost, and the lack of public transit mean that it's less frequented by local English-speaking teens.

The youth centre project brings together a number of partners, including the city of Percé, the Barachois Recreational Centre, Aire ouverte, the Maison des jeunes de Gaspé, the Literacy Council, public health, and the Carrefours jeunesse emploi, though the most important partners are the youth themselves.

The hub is a major infrastructure project years in the making, with financing from governments and numerous other sources, to create a safe, inclusive, bilingual space where kids aged twelve to seventeen can gather for drop-ins, creative workshops, peer support, and active living programming. The SeaScape Hangout will provide a much-needed and long-awaited dedicated space for youth in Barachois.

Heritage tourism is a huge contributor to the vitality and economy of the region.

Frozen Meals program

Social development certificate of recognition from the MRC Côte-de-Gaspé

Bright Beginnings program

Social development certificate of recognition from the MRC Côte-de-Gaspé

Changes & Challenges

Vision Gaspé-Percé Now has been a steady presence along a significant stretch of the Gaspé's eastern section. The organization's reach follows roughly two hundred kilometres of coastline, from Manche-d'Épée, past the cliffs and fishing wharves, all the way beyond Percé along Highway 132, threading together more than thirty small villages and a handful of larger towns, especially the regional hubs of Gaspé and Percé.

English speakers in the Gaspé are a minority, but still make a up a significant proportion of the population—about twelve percent of the population in Gaspé and more than twenty percent in Percé, with smaller pockets scattered through coastal hamlets and inland, including in Murdochville, where nearly four percent of residents are Anglophone, and where Vision maintains a meaningful presence. The English-speaking population has declined since Vision's founding in 2004, a decrease attributed to youth outmigration, an aging population, and limited employment opportunities.

The Gaspé coast is beautiful—it's not hard to understand the attachment to this place—but it's also stretched thin. Services can be scarce, especially in the smaller villages, and getting from one place to another isn't always easy when public transit options are limited or nonexistent. Seniors and people on tight budgets feel service gaps most sharply. Technology has helped close some distances, but the recent shift toward virtual spaces has also chipped away at the importance of gathering in person, which matters more in a minority community, and in rural areas.

Opening a second office in Barachois, in 2019, was a major milestone. Part of what has helped make regional programming effective for Vision has been the presence on staff of employees who know the communities. For instance, Melissa Savidant, Vision's executive assistant and project coordinator, is from Murdochville. "She'll go up to Murdoch to run the wellness program up there," cultural coordinator Tesia Hackett explains; "she already has an idea what the realities are, and the nuances."

Vision Gaspé-Percé Now has been a steady presence along the Gaspé's eastern section.

Across the wider Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine region (administrative region 11), the English-speaking community continues to contend with higher unemployment, lower incomes, lower levels of formal education, and a greater proportion of vulnerable households, including single-parent families, than their French-speaking neighbours. Social and economic inequities—whether tied to education, health, or mental health—have a way of echoing across generations, quietly reinforcing cycles of hardship that communities like these are working hard to break.

Each town has its own history and challenges. In recent years, Vision has grown northward along the coast, responding to needs as they surface. In the smaller coastal and inland villages, English speakers tend to be older and remain unilingual, facing real barriers when it comes to accessing essential information and services.

Although Vision was founded long after the political tumult of the late twentieth century in Quebec, government policy, including recent shifts to a more nationalist discourse, influence the organization's mandate, and, in many ways, shape what the organization does for the community. Vision contributed to the development of the provincial Stratégie gouvernementale pour les Québécois d'expression anglaise in 2017 by identifying local priorities. As the political landscape changes, Vision does too, says Synnott. "The more restrictions our government places on English services, the more relevant and vital Vision's role becomes within an English-speaking population."











Many aspects of Vision's role have remained central for twenty years, most notably access to health and social services. Providing support to seniors has also been an important part of Vision's programming, for over a decade. The fifty-plus program had long consisted primarily of the wellness centre in Gaspé, where a group of women would gather. "But now," says Hackett, "we've got Murdochville, Douglastown, and Barachois, and we're continuing the Gaspé Wellness Centre."

The lack of educational opportunities in English is probably the hardest thing.

In Percé and Gaspé, younger families often grapple instead with questions of schooling, jobs, and staying rooted in the region. English-speaking youth are largely bilingual, moving fluidly between English and French. That bilingualism is both a strength and a necessity socially and economically, yet it can also blur the lines of identity and loosen the ties that once bound the community.

Proximity to schooling adds pressure to families, with children and teens travelling considerable distances to maintain English education, a limitation that is exacerbated as students progress. Vision frequently collaborates with local schools. As Gaspé Elementary and Belle Anse Elementary principal Beryl Boyle explains, "part of what Vison does within the school environment is to help us engage our students," she says, citing extracurricular activities and literacy programs. The town of Gaspé is well served for secondary school, with students attending Gaspe Polyvalent School. The Poly shares a building with the French school, which opens opportunities for the students even as it cultivates a sense of community among the small student body on the English side.

Across the region, however, as far as Jessica Synnott is concerned, "the lack of educational opportunities in English is probably the hardest thing." By CEGEP, she says, "there's not much there in terms of English. And vocational training as well, though that seems to be getting a little bit better." Vision project coordinator Julie Syvret, who oversees the youth-related programming, is an important part of supporting youth and collaborating with schools; the outreach also builds bridges between the two language communities. "She goes into the high schools," her colleague Hackett says, "and organizes activities for both the French- and the English-speaking high school students to come together." The efforts are starting to pay off: "We've been there more consistently,"

according to Synnott, “and you see that the youth are understanding our organization a lot more, they’re more familiar with it.” Youth services are also crucial to plant seeds for the future of the community, and of the organization. “The hope is that they’ll continue into adulthood.”

The English-speaking population has come together through music.

There are some challenges that are common to regional communities, and some that touch linguistic minorities universally. But community development is not just about meeting needs; it is also about seizing opportunities. “Vision adopts a community-centered approach, with collaborative leadership that is both adaptable and responsive,” Synnott says. The executive director herself embodies a guidance style that fosters individual assets, Hackett adds: “She really wants to uplift everybody on the team.” Vision has been intentional about marshalling the strength of each staff member. For instance, Hackett, who recently joined the Vision team from Victoria, British Columbia, has a background as a community herbalist, and has been diversifying the cultural offerings to include plant-related workshops. For Hackett, it has been a way to get to know her adopted community and to explore hitherto unknown aspects of the local heritage. “A lot of people have stories of collecting pine pitch in the forest,” she says, “or they gather mushrooms in the fall, or go blueberry picking.”

Vision Gaspé-Percé Now can’t be all things to all people, but it does try to provide something for everyone. Traditionally, the English-speaking population has come together through music. The York Winter Carnival, the Homecoming Festival, and Irish Days were for many years keystones in the annual calendar of the English-speaking community of the eastern Gaspé, and community consultations have heeded repeated calls for live concerts, historical presentations, traditional music, and festivals and exhibits. Recent square-dancing activities have notably been popular, with all age groups—“a really wonderful intergenerational, intercultural way of bringing people together,” says Hackett. Culture is also a way to stave off a sense of isolation, and ensure the preservation of the region’s heritage. A project with local musicologists has allowed Vision to digitize music archives, ensuring that the roots of English speakers in the eastern Gaspé are known, shared, and celebrated for years to come.

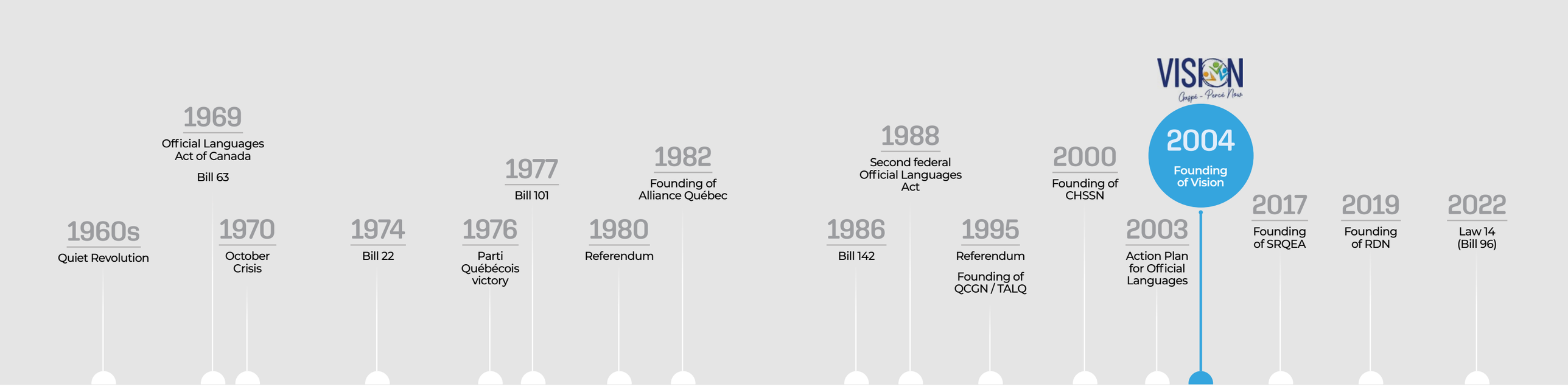
Legacy & Leadership

Vision Gaspé-Percé Now has grown into an important community development organization, operating in two MRCs, with multiple programming avenues, stable core funding, and a dozen employees.

Vision is prioritizing supporting youth and seniors, improving access to English-language services, and encouraging local economic growth. Employment development is a new area for the organization, and Vision is planning a guidance counselling project. “We have a partner table with the employment organizations,” Jessica Synnott says, “and we want to set up a referral system.”

Newcomer support is another growth sector: as elsewhere in the regions, community demographics are changing. Many English speakers are new to the area, and their integration into all aspects of society is crucial. As with so much of community development, collaboration is the magic word. “We see a future where the English-speaking population is active, connected, and thriving,” Synnott says. “Preserving culture and promoting inclusion will continue to guide our efforts.”

Looking ahead, the organization hopes to be able to have its own building someday—Synnott would love “a resource centre, right in Gaspé,” she says, with “space partners could use, a community kitchen, maybe even a place people could access some health services.” Vision is still wrapping up the youth centre in Barachois, and a new infrastructure project would be a lot right now. But Vision’s energy and capacity to dream are boundless. Every day at Vision is a fresh start, which is one of Synnott’s favourite parts of the job: “It’s always changing. There’s always something that needs to be worked on.”


1960s
Quiet Revolution
1969
Official Languages Act of Canada
Bill 63
1970
October Crisis
1974
Bill 22
1976
Parti Québécois victory
1977
Bill 101
1980
Referendum
1982
Founding of Alliance Québec
1986
Bill 142
1988
Second federal Official Languages Act
1995
Referendum
Founding of QCGN / TALQ
2000
Founding of CHSSN
2003
Action Plan for Official Languages
VISION
Gaspé - Percé Nous
2004
Founding of Vision
2017
Founding of SRQEA
2019
Founding of RDN
2022
Law 14 (Bill 96)